

**Minnesota Children's Museum
and
Anoka Community Action Program, Community Action Partnership of Ramsey
and Washington Counties & Parents in Community Action**

Region V	
Minnesota Children's Museum 10 West Seventh Street St. Paul, MN 55102 Tel: 651-225-6001 www.mcm.org	Anoka County Community Action Program (ACCAP) 9574 Foley Boulevard Coon Rapids, MN 55433 Tel: 763-783-4747 http://www.accap.org/head_start.asp Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties (CAPRW) 450 Syndicate Street N St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel: 651-645-6445 http://caprw.org Parents in Community Action (PICA) www.picaheadstart.org

INITIATING THE PARTNERSHIP

Currently, Minnesota Children's Museum is working with three different Head Start grantees. The Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties (CAPRW) is six years old, and the other partnerships are each in their third year.

The partnerships began when the Minnesota Children's Museum applied for a National Science Foundation Grant to fund a project called "Go Figure" which was based on early math concepts. As part of the grant, the museum initiated contact with the staff of Ramsey Head Start to discuss the exhibit. The museum agreed to do some math training for the Head Start teachers and to provide guidance to the teachers on how to organize a math family night as part of their monthly family meetings for Head Start. The partnership began with the training of Head Start teachers using a math program called Family Math, a curriculum developed by the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California, Berkeley.



Both the Education and Exhibit Departments of the museum cooperated in the program's development. The Exhibit Department was heavily involved since this particular partnership was tied to a traveling exhibit the museum was creating.

The partnership with Anoka County Community Action Program (ACCAP) began when a teacher who had been employed by the Ramsey Head Start transferred to the Anoka/Washington Head Start. She was an education coordinator who really liked the museum's program. She contacted the museum to see if there was a possibility of creating a similar program with the two

counties in the Anoka/ Washington area.

The Parents in Community Action (PICA -Hennepin County) program began differently because the museum had been trying to initiate contact with them for a long time. When the Hennepin Head Start hired a new literacy coordinator, the literacy coordinator made the initial contact with the museum wondering just what the museum had to offer. Soon after, the museum provided some training for the Hennepin Head Start teachers and included them in museum family nights.

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Partnering with Head Start seemed like a natural connection because the Minnesota Children's Museum really is designed to serve a young population and is particularly focused on early childhood. The average age of the children who visit the museum is five. Head Start seemed to serve a group of children who could benefit from the museum's resources. In addition, the staff at Head Start shared with us their need for additional staff training. The museum was already creating workshops for preschool teachers in general. Part of the training provided included workshops around seeing math and science in everyday life. These workshops offer another opportunity for the Head Start children to do science and math activities and for adults to observe and participate.

One goal for partnering with Head Start was to help families see museums and organizations as a resource that is available to them. There are many places that have discounted tickets for families and the museum wanted Head Start families to realize that the museum was a place they could come.

The three Head Start grantees participate in Museum Family Nights. Each Museum Family Night is a two-hour visit at the museum that includes all family members. While at the museum, families can activate a free family membership.



Because of the availability of grant funding, Minnesota Children's Museum is most actively engaged with the

Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties (CAPRW) Head Start. The museum's staffers go out to the CAPRW site to provide support for Family Math Nights and to help them plan for future Math Nights. In coordination with the Head Start education coordinators, the museum helps Head Start staff evaluate the partnership program through surveys. Ramsey County Head Start is responsible for the surveys of their teachers and the museum does surveys of the parents. In addition to the family nights, Ramsey County Head Start now has a system-wide field trip to the Minnesota Children's Museum. Children in the Ramsey County Head Start attend family nights with their families and the children in each center visit the museum for a field trip. Prior to the partnership, the Head Start centers visited as individual groups. Now every center is scheduled to visit individually through the Head Start grantee and receives a discounted rate on top of the discounted group rate.

Hennepin County Head Start programs have family nights at the museum and are provided free memberships. Hennepin County Head Start also conducts a program called PICA, Parents in Community Action, out of which arose a program called PICA University. PICA University offers staff/teacher training a week before school starts each year. The museum's education staff is invited to offer workshops during this time.

Each year the Anoka/Washington County Head Start, in conjunction with the Minnesota Children's Museum, provides trainings on different topics. The museum staff consults with Head Start staff on potential topics for upcoming trainings and then conducts those trainings at the Head Start site.

In the past, training topics have included:

- Family Math Training;
- Pint-Size Science is about physical science and how adults can provide a science learning environment using everyday materials;
- Nurturing Nature provides opportunities for exploring plants and animals and their relationship to the environment;
- Music and Movement; and
- Drawing to Learn is a visual arts focused training in which teachers learn to see the stages through which young children grow in drawing and then learn how to provide open-ended art experiences for them.

At Ramsey Head Start, planning for these trainings includes an examination of the community assessments but the other Head Start programs do not share the results of those assessments. The other Head Start programs tell the museum what they need and the museum talks with each of their education coordinators to plan the upcoming trainings.

These are formal partnerships. This is particularly true with the Ramsey Head Start. Because the funder requires clear expectations and program goals, a greater level of documented accountability must be provided.

The other partnerships are a little more informal. However, the museum is now beginning formal contracting with the Hennepin County grantee. In these contracts, expectations are clearly defined:

- The museum will deliver trainings;
- The Head Start grantee will ensure that every center schedules a family night; and
- The Head Start teachers and parents will complete the family night evaluations.



The Minnesota Children's Museum staffers go to the Hennepin and Anoka/Washington Counties Head Start programs for teacher training. The Ramsey County staff members visit the museum. There have been approximately 90–100 participating teachers from the Ramsey County program, so the museum does three separate trainings in order to create smaller groups for the workshops.

Head Start staff members have been through the Family Math and Pint-Size Science workshops. This year, they requested a refresher to help them develop some new and related ideas, activities, and strategies. The trainings offered are not affiliated with any college or university.

Currently, Head Start staff members receive credit for “clock hours” that are counted toward their in-service training requirements. For some, this is satisfactory; for others, accreditation offering would be invaluable. The training sessions are three hours each. This does not satisfy the minimum requirements for college credits unless the museum combines or schedules consecutive workshops. Right now, however, there is only one training for each teacher during the course of the school year. The museum offers roughly seven trainings for three different grantees over the course of the school year.

The Head Start grantees constitute some of the museum's largest partnerships. The museum has found it much more efficient to communicate and create programs system-wide through the grantees, rather than working separately with each individual center. This way all the centers share the same opportunities. The Head Start grantees that are involved monitor which centers have already completed their museum visits and which centers still have them in our upcoming schedule. They also assist in the logistics for the field trip.

As a result of this centralization, the museum no longer has to call and make separate agreements and arrangements with the individual Head Start centers. Grantee offices have also streamlined the funding process so that it is administered entirely through their central office rather than through the administrative processes of the individual Head Start centers.

RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN THE PARTNERSHIP

Grant funding for what is called the Ramsey Action totals about \$15,000 in grant monies from a local foundation. This foundation has maintained the grant for about six years. However, the museum development program is currently seeking some other funding. This has been an “easy-to-fund” program, as some foundations have come to understand the importance of reaching the population served by Head Start.



The other Head Start partnerships are not grant funded, but we do provide them with significant discounts. They are charged for family nights and for the workshops that the museum offers--but not at a high rate. Family night attendance has been 500 to 600 people, at a cost of \$250.00 to the Head Start program. Actual costs are more than \$250.00 just for staffing the event and keeping the museum open after hours. A certain level of commitment to this kind of programming is built into the general operating funds of the museum’s annual budget and the museum continues its strong commitment to providing more of its funding to such “mission-driven” programs.

Probably, the most important ingredient for partnership success is good and clear communication between the administrations of both the Head Start programs and the museum. For example, the museum has set up meetings with center leaders and staff to explain the museum’s offerings and address any needs or questions they might have. The museum has found it important to ask the Head Start programs what their needs are and has developed programs informed by that feedback. Determining what are Head Start needs rather than asking them to adapt to whatever is offered is a much more successful way of creating programs that are satisfying for all involved. For example, the “refresher course” was created entirely as a response to the requests of Head Start teachers.

Another important factor in sustaining a partnership over time is funding. Initially the museum received funding from a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, but the museum no longer has that level of funding.

Additionally, working directly through the Head Start grantees’ administration has been beneficial. The Minnesota Children’s Museum is a “big” player in the world of children’s museums and not all organizations are comfortable or equipped to interact with an organization of that size. Working through the administrative offices of the Head Start grantees has been much more efficient and has created a much broader level of involvement. We are serving



relatively large Head Start grantees. The Ramsey County program alone serves approximately 1400 students and in Hennepin County 2500 children are served.

THE BENEFITS OF A HEAD START/MUSEUM PARTNERSHIP

Serving Head Start programs has really helped the Minnesota Children's Museum in its efforts to reach out to underserved communities that the museum may not have ever been able to access. As a result of this partnership, the museum has really been able to attract families from the communities. The partnership has also enhanced the museum's capacity to obtain outside funding as funding organizations are actively looking to support programs that serve this diverse early childhood population and, in turn, we are supported to bring a far more diverse population into the museum.

One particular benefit to Head Start programs and staff is the added value in the trainings we offer. The museum has a highly qualified staff working to plan and develop our programs specifically to satisfy the criteria set out in the *Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* and to also address the *Early Childhood Indicators of Success* established by the State of Minnesota and designed to be similarly outcomes-based. In Minnesota, Head Start children are evaluated and assessed on both. In addition, the Head Start families are coming to recognize Minnesota's children's museum as one of the readily available resources in the community.



One of the roles of the museum is to connect our broader community with the resources of the museum. Anything the museum can do to increase school readiness of children in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area is of benefit to the greater community. In this role, the museum's goal is to enhance the skills of the teachers who can, in turn, increase the capacities of the children. The museum does not evaluate its services by assessing shifts in the performance of the children. The museum continues to conduct workshops and early education training on-site for early childhood educators and child care providers. Minnesota Children's Museum would also like to offer trainings for home-based providers, but still needs to figure out how to best serve or reach them effectively.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

Groups in which multiple languages are spoken can be very tricky. In the communities surrounding the museum, there is no single or dominant language spoken. There are families who speak Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. The challenge is that the museum

cannot communicate just by posting a bilingual sign—there are more than two languages spoken in any one Head Start group. This is something that the museum is really working to address. For example, the museum has translated the text accompanying its exhibits into multiple languages. Membership applications, brochures, guides, and direction forms are available in several languages. Head Start programs are helping to provide teaching assistants who can help with interpreting between children and museum staff.

Funding is always a challenge and so the museum's development program does a great deal to find additional funding to support our programming.

In addition, and though it has improved a great deal, there has been some rapid turnover of both teaching and administrative staff in the Head Start programs. For a time, the museum was not experiencing the kind of follow-through from their side necessary to building and maintaining a strong partnership. For example, they would schedule and we would plan and offer a teacher training for which attendance would be proportionately low. Now, the Head Start director has been in place for a while and that problem has diminished significantly.

Another challenge emerges in the follow-up stage for the programs we design and offer training. So far, the museum has not put into place a coaching or mentoring model to provide the support for the follow-up stage. The coaching and mentoring currently offered to Head Start teachers begins with the Head Start program's education coordinators. We are interested in exploring methods for tracking the teachers' application of their new learning. We hope to work more closely with the education coordinators and encourage them to do more monitoring and mentoring so that they can keep us informed about progress in the implementation phase.

And, finally, the museum has found that Head Start days are short. It can be a challenge for the teachers and students to schedule a museum visit. By the time students are fed, and travel to the museum, there is often very little time left for the museum's activities. Scheduling visits for times when the museum is not busy with other visits usually can provide them with a quality hour of program time. This works well for afternoon visits, but the museum is usually quite crowded in the morning. There are also particular times of year when Head Start cannot schedule visits. For instance, in the fall when children are not yet ready for the changes of routine that a field trip requires.

LESSONS TO SHARE

Head Start is an appropriate partner for us. Because Head Start and the museum are large organizations it has worked for us to institute a system-wide partnership. We try to follow the maxim “Dance with those who want to dance.” Try not to force a relationship, if the timing is not quite right. At Hennepin County program we found the Head Start staff who envisioned how a partnership would benefit their program. The program really took off and it has become a very successful partnership for us. In this case, we are working with a large organized system.

Museums are really interested in partnering with Head Start and often have great resources to share. Head Start programs can create dynamic partnerships with museums, libraries (and other community cultural centers).